

# CHRISTMAS IN RUSSIA



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Little Paulina





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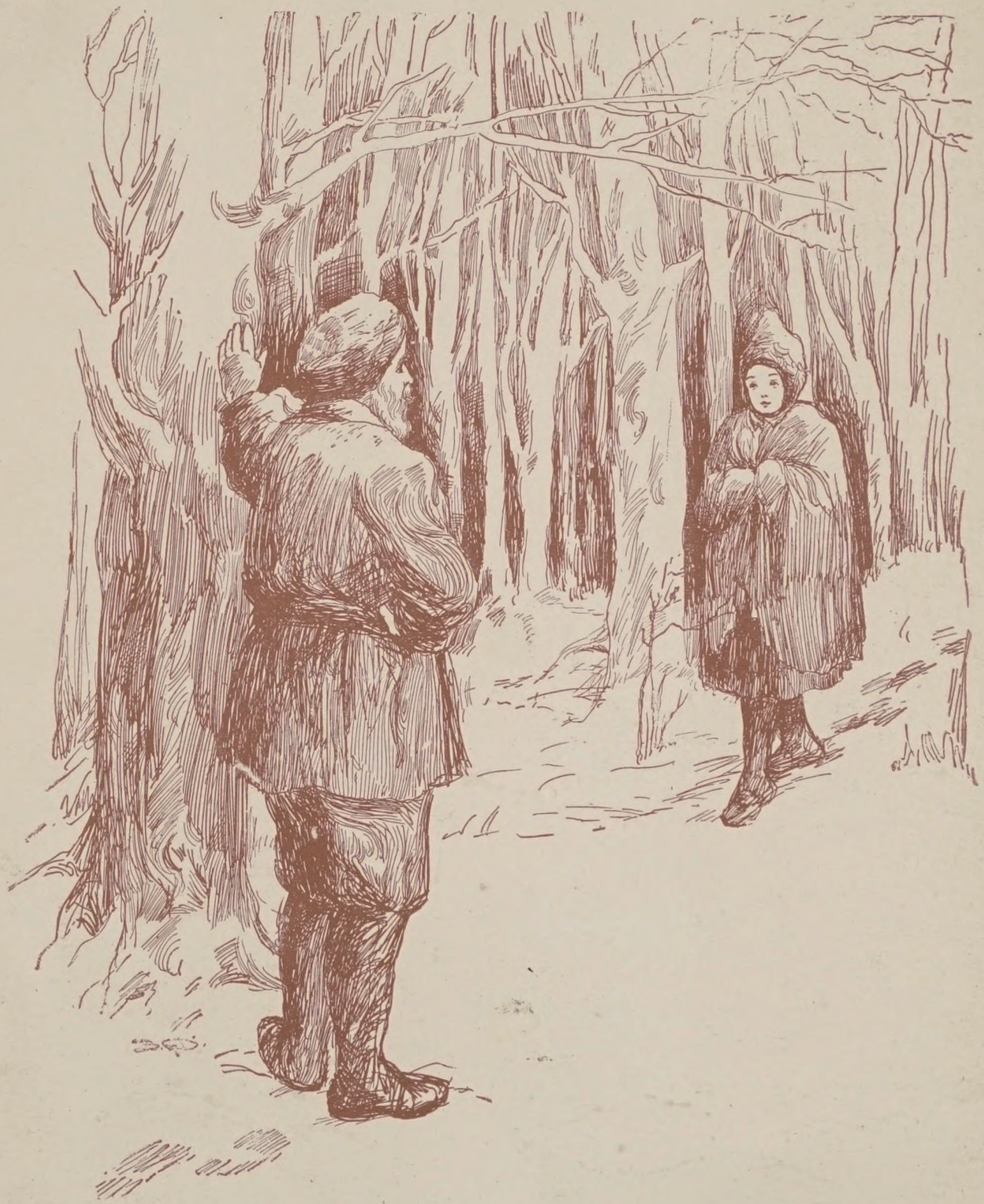
















# Little Paulina

Christmas in Russia

ADAPTED FROM  
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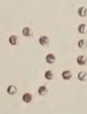


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LITTLE PAULINA

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## LITTLE PAULINA : CHRISTMAS IN RUSSIA

IT was nearing the close of a short winter's day, — the day before Christmas. Thickly fell the snow, fiercely keen blew the northern wind, heaping the drifts into crannies and gullies, and then whirling them far and wide. The fir-trees were all behung with wreaths of sheeted white, that the next blast flung abroad in scattered showers. The sky lowered above all, gray, cheerless, and hopeless, as a man — setting his teeth hard, and facing the inclemency as he best might — cast his eyes up toward the heavens, and then looked around him, with an air that bespoke his having lost his way amid the solitudes of the pine forest.

He might have been a denizen of the place, for the coarseness and even squalor of his clothing. The rough tunic and cloak of sheepskin, the bearhide gloves, and wolfskin cap befitted the meanest serf. But for all his peasant garb, it was clear he was a stranger in this part of the country.

With one more perplexed look about him, he suddenly shouted aloud. The sound seemed dulled and deadened by the damp, frozen air and the curtained canopy of overhanging trees.

His voice seemed shut in, like himself, within the confines of this dreary wood prison. Yet once again he shouted, — once again sent forth an appealing cry for aid, — if it might be that



human aid was near. And then — amid the gloom and silence — there came an answering sound, — a cry high-pitched, but dulled by distance and by seeming lack of power in the shouter.

The man turned his steps in the direction of the response he had heard, calling loudly. It was repeated, and evidently drew nearer. Just then he emerged from among the thickest of the trees, into a more open space, a sort of pathway leading through the forest.

Along this track he could now see, coming toward him, a small, dark figure, muffled in fur. It looked like a black bundle, more than a human being. The head was enveloped in a dark sheepskin cap, that fitted so closely around the face as to show only eyes, nose, and mouth. The body was wrapped in a cloak, and the lower limbs were encased in thick leggings and boots. Except that the head and shoulders were plentifully sprinkled with snow, and the small patch of face looked bright and rosy, the whole seemed a moving ball, of coarse, dark, furry stuff.

But the rosy patch looked cheerily. The dark leggings stumped along with an alert, assured step; and it was evident that from this small muffled individual came the high-pitched cry that had answered the man's call for help.

The man hastened to meet the child, saying: —

“Well met, little one! Direct me out of this wood. Be my guide. You doubtless know every winding of the forest path.”

“I am a stranger in these parts,” the child answered. “I came from the capital. I live in Kief — that is, I did live there. I am going to find a home with my father.”

“And where is your father?” said the man.

“They banished him — he's in exile — I am going to him,” she replied.

“Going to him! Do you know how far it is to the frozen regions whither culprits are banished, little one?” asked the man.



“ Yes; I know it is a long way off — but I have managed to come nearly a fourth of my journey, and I shall get through the rest, never fear.”

“ ‘ Never fear!’ But don’t you fear? It’s a long way, and a fearful place when you get there.”

“ I know it is; but if it’s bad for me, it’s bad for my father, — and it will make the place better for him if he have his little Paulina with him, to help him bear its fearfulness.”

“ I am not speaking of what it is to him. It would be more tolerable to him, I dare say, with his child to keep him company there; but what I mean is, that it will be a terrible place for you — you don’t know its horrors.”

“ Oh, yes, I do. They told me of them when he was banished. They tried to prevent my going after him, but I got away. I made my escape — I crept out of the house — I watched my opportunity — I managed to get past the sentinels at the city gates — I have made my way, by little and little. I shall reach there, never fear.” And she nodded with an assured air, as she repeated the last words.

The man shook his head. “ You don’t know the place you are so eager to reach, my little maid,” he said.

“ I dare say it’s very dreadful; but, however bad it may be, home is worse now, — without my father.”

“ And who is your father?” said the man.

The child was just about to answer in her prompt, straightforward way; but she caught the earnest, scrutinizing look of the stranger, as his eye rested upon her, while he asked the question. She checked herself, and said: “ Didn’t you say you had lost your way in this forest? Do you live far from here?”

An odd smile passed over the man’s face, as he answered: “ Yes; very far. I have wandered among the depths of this forest till I’m perishing with cold, and starving with hunger.



I want food and shelter. How far distant is the next village?"

"They told me it was some miles on," said the child. "But I'll tell you what I'll do for you. Instead of taking you on with me there, I'll turn back with you, to the good woman at whose hut I slept last night. She gave me a night's lodging, and I dare say she'll do as much for you. She has a kind heart."

The same smile passed over his face, as the man replied: "If you present me to her as your friend, — an unfortunate fellow who has lost his way, — I have no doubt she will take me under her roof. And, truly, in this snow-storm, the sooner food and warmth may be had, the better. But in securing them for me, you are hindering your journey, little one. Shall you not grudge the delay?"

"It will be but a few hours. You need my help. If I turn out of my way to give it you, my journey afterward will prosper the better," she said. "My father would approve of it."

"Your father is a worthy man, then?"

"You seem to doubt it!" said the child, turning a flashing eye up toward the speaker.

"If he be so, — and his teaching his child charity and kindness of conduct speaks in his favor, — how comes it that the emperor banished him?" returned the man.

"The emperor was made to believe unjustly of my father. Enemies misrepresented his actions. My father was too proud to vindicate himself to his sovereign, even had he had the opportunity of pleading his own cause."

Again the man smiled, and then fell into a reverie, while his young conductress took him by the hand, and led him along the path by which she had come. After a time she looked up into his face, and, seeing its dreamy expression, said: "You are feeling sleepy, are you not? Beware of that!"



“I do find myself drowsily inclined,” said the man. “The cold — the long fast — the many hours’ wandering — I own I shall be glad of a moment’s rest, little one. Let us stop here a few minutes.”

And he would have leaned against the trunk of one of the nearest trees skirting the forest track; but the child exclaimed vehemently, — tugging at his hand: “No, no! you must not rest. Anything but that! Rouse yourself! Come on, come on! Here, take me up in your arms, and carry me for a little way. The exertion will do you good, and the warmth of my body will help to unnumb you. Lift me up; be quick!”

The man laughed, but obeyed her peremptory order. There was such an air of decision in all she said and did, — as if it were the only right thing to be said or done, — that it was difficult to resist her commands. In the present instance, the course she had appointed was certainly the best that could have been hit upon for averting the threatened danger.

The effort of raising her helped the man to throw off the overpowering sensation of drowsiness that was fast seizing upon him; and when she was in his arms, she nestled close to him, and hugged him around the neck. She was a slight child of her age, so that she was not inconveniently heavy; yet, had she been even heavier, the man, though unaccustomed to bear such weights, would have willingly gone on carrying her.

“Do you know, I have just such a little girl of my own, — a little daughter, — perhaps a year or two younger than you, with whom I was going to spend the Christmas Day, when, owing to an accident, I became lost in the forest. I should like my little girl to thank you for your care of her father. I wish she could see you. What say you to coming with me to my home, and making friends with her?”

“I should like it very much; but you live far from here,



and I must not let anything interfere with my journey to my father."

"But my home — at least, the place where my little girl now is — lies all in your way. You must pass it going to your father. We'll journey together, as far as we can. Our first concern is, to get back to your friendly peasant woman's hut, recruit our strength, and afterward to devise some means of getting on. Perhaps she can provide us with a guide."

"Trust to me, I'll guide you," said the child.

He laughed but made no reply.

"Now you've got over your drowsiness, you can set me down again," she resumed.

"But you'll be glad of the lift. You must be tired," said the man; "and I don't mind carrying you, if it rests you."

"Oh, I'm not at all tired. I've learned to walk a good long way, now, without wanting to rest. Set me down, please. It will do us both good to be in sharper exercise. Here, let's run! It'll warm us. Come! One, two, three, and away!"

The man hesitated. "I'm not in the humor to run," he said, laughing.

"Nonsense! It'll do you good! You must!" she replied. "The less you feel inclined to stir quickly, the more necessary it is you should exert yourself. It's only the numbing effect of this bleak air. You feel chilled inside, don't you? But, never mind! Nothing like a race to cure you. Now, then! Give me your hand! Let's start for that clump of low bushes, yonder!"

She planned several of these running matches, fixing the starting-posts, appointing the goals, arranging and deciding all the particulars. And when they had been successively achieved, she turned to the man, and said with an air of satisfied triumph: "Well! wasn't I right? You feel warmer now, don't you?"

He returned her nod with another, smiling, and highly enter-



tained. But she, quite gravely, rejoined: "Of course; and yet, if I had not made you take a good run, you'd have kept creep-creep-creeping along, till your blood had become as stagnant as the surface of our Dnieper, when it's frozen into ice a foot thick. Besides, the race has not only made you warm, it has beguiled the way; for here is the good woman's hut close at



hand. Now, once more. Give me this much start, and I'll beat you!"

The good peasant woman received her little guest of overnight and her companion with much hearty kindness.

"'Tis a wild place," she said, "and when one of these sudden snow-storms come on, 'tis hard for us — let alone a stranger — to find the way out."

"I've given him a helping hand as far as I can," said the child



with her decisive nod. "Now it's for you to do your share, and kindly give him a meal, as you did me last night."

"What I have, he shall be welcome to," said the woman.

"Thanks, mistress," replied the man. "I sha'n't forget you; and one day or other—" he paused; and Paulina finished his sentence for him. "One day or other," she said, "it may be your chance to meet with some poor body even worse off than yourself. Do what you can for them. That will be the best way of returning this good woman's kindness to us."

The child said this while she was bustling about, helping the woman to spread the table, and prepare the meal. She trotted about diligently, seeming to know where everything was kept, and making herself quite at home.

She still kept the poor stranger under her immediate protection, providing for his accommodation and comfort, pointing a seat out for him near to the hearth; relieving him of his outer cloak, and hanging it up on a nail; lifting the fur cap from his head, and beating the snow out of it, before she replaced it; hovering about him, and paying him those little fondling attentions, half-cherishing, half-deferential, which mark the conduct of a child toward an indulgent parent.

Presently she came and sat down beside him on the settle. "What a curious ring you have upon this finger. It's something like one that my father used to wear. But his was an emerald; and this is, of course, a bit of green glass. Still, it's very pretty,—it looks almost as well. Indeed, it's larger; and here are some curious characters engraved upon it. Who gave it you?"

"It was my father's," said the man.

"Then, of course, not in the worst poverty could you part with it," said she. "It is a false stone, isn't it?"

"Having passed from father to son, for many generations,



and from my own father's hands into mine, it possesses a value for me beyond the most priceless gem," answered he.

"And it really is pretty in itself," said the child, "and very curious. These characters are like those I have heard my father describe upon the imperial signet; he said his own ring was very like the emperor's, only smaller, and quite plain. Yours is about



the size, — and with just such characters. Perhaps it was made in imitation; but, though it's an imitation jewel, it's very bright and pretty. It's just as good as if it were real."

"Just," said the man. "I'm quite satisfied with it. The emperor's own signet-ring couldn't content me better."

"Ah, but it would me," said the child. "If I had that, I'd soon use it to some purpose. I'd affix it to the deed which should repeal my father's sentence."



She turned the ring round and round upon the man's finger, as his hand still lay in hers, sighed thoughtfully, then looked out toward the still falling snow, saying: "But I am dreaming of what I should like to happen, when I ought to be working at what I can do. We stay too long. Come, let us be going."

"The afternoon is set in for a continued fall of snow," said the peasant woman. "Best not to venture into the forest now. Nightfall will overtake you before you can reach the village. Abide another night here, and set out to-morrow early. You will be all the better for the rest."

"But even if you are so kind as to let me sleep here again, and share your eldest child's cot, as I did before, how can you manage for our poor friend here?" said the little girl, pointing to the stranger.

"The good man can lie upon this settle, by the side of the hearth. 'Twill be a warm, snug berth for him; and if it be a little rough or hard, he has lain upon many a rougher and harder, I'll warrant," said the woman with a good-humored smile.

"The field of battle is a harder couch. Stretched wounded upon the earth in the open air is rougher lying than upon this good settle," replied the man.

"You are warm now, hands and all," said the child. "I will leave you for a little while, that I may help our kind hostess. While she and I are about it, you can rock the cradle with your foot."

While thus busily engaged, Paulina was struck by a sound in the outer room, as of talking. She listened. She could not distinguish the words, but she felt certain that she heard another man's voice in reply to that of the stranger. The talking was carried on in a low, whispered tone, but talking she assuredly heard.

When she returned to the room, however, the stranger was



alone, and sitting in precisely the same attitude as she had left him, — bending over the wood embers, spreading his hands to catch their welcome warmth, and with one foot resting on the rocker of the cradle.

“You see, I am obeying your commands,” he said, glancing with a smile toward the cradle.

“I’m glad to see you can profit by good example,” she said.



“I fancied you were neglecting your duty, and so came to remind you of it. But it’s all right. I made a mistake, I see.”

The next morning, at daybreak, Paulina was astir, and preparing to set out. She went to rouse the stranger, whom she found still fast asleep on the settle.

“Awake, awake! It is time we were off,” she said, as she shook him by the shoulder.

“How now!” exclaimed the man, angrily, as he half-started up, half-opened his eyes, and looked around him in surprise.



“It is a fine morning. The snow has ceased. We ought to be on our way. Come! up with you!” said the child.

“It is too early, — by and by, — another hour’s rest,” muttered the man, as he let himself fall back upon the settle.

“I can’t afford to wait an hour longer,” said Paulina. “If you prefer another hour’s sleep to my guidance, stay behind. But, take my word; you had much better go with me through the wood. Remember how you lost yourself yesterday. Well, what say you? Decide at once; for I am in a hurry to be off.”

“Since you will have it so, — I suppose I must,” said the man, yawning, stretching, and rising reluctantly. “But what a terrible tyrant you are, my little protectress.”

“It’s all for your good,” returned she. “I want to set out early, in order that we may reach the village on the other side of the wood before evening.”

The man laughed; while she alertly set before him the black bread and the warm milk and water, which the good woman had provided for their breakfast, and brought him his sheep-skin cloak, and helped to fasten it under his chin.

The weather had quite cleared up. For a Russian climate, the day was fine; and the two wanderers made their way through the forest with such good speed that it was still early in the afternoon when they reached the village. It was a very small hamlet, consisting of a few wood-cutters’ huts. At the door of the most important looking among them, which served as a sort of post-house, there stood a sledge, surrounded by a small retinue of attendants, as if awaiting the master. Paulina lingered a moment to admire the pretty trappings of the vehicle, its soft cushions, its fur and velvet linings, the bright harness, and the elegant shape of the coach itself.

Her companion asked one of the men standing near, whither the sledge was bound.



“We are going to take it for our master to Igorhof,” replied the attendant.

“The very place where my daughter is.”

“As the sledge is going empty to Igorhof, I wonder whether these people would allow us to ride in it,” said the man. “I should



dearly love to reach Igorhof on Christmas Day. I'll tell them I'm not so poor as I seem, and that, if they'll trust my word and allow us to ride, I'll pay them for their courtesy when we arrive at Igorhof, where I have friends and money.”

“But is that true?” asked the child.

“Perfectly true,” answered the man.



“We can but try, then,” said Paulina. “It would help us on our way delightfully. But I’m afraid they won’t believe such shabbily dressed people as you and I; and perhaps they will object to our riding in the fine coach, lest we should soil it, and they get into disgrace with their master. Still, we can but try. After all, if they refuse, we are but where we were.”

“To be sure,” said the man. “Besides, I can offer them my ring as a pledge for the money I promise them, until we reach Igorhof.”

“But as it’s a false stone, they won’t care to take it,” said the child. “And if they believe it real, and accept it for such, that would be deceiving them.”

“Never mind, I can but try,” repeated the man.

“Well, you can try if they’ll take it, when you have owned it to be false; but tell the truth.”

“Never fear; I’ll say nothing but the truth—the exact truth,” said the man, as he advanced toward one of the attendants.

Paulina could not hear exactly what passed between them; but she saw the stranger show the groom his ring. She saw that there was an explanation, — a request made, — and, at length, acquiescence given.

The man returned to her side. “He has consented,” said he, “and has undertaken for his fellows to agree that we shall occupy the empty carriage as far as Igorhof.”

“That will be charming!” exclaimed the child. “I hope they’ll not be long before they set out.”

“Well done, eagerness!” exclaimed the man. “But you forget that I’ve fasted since daybreak, and I must have something to eat. I’ll go into the house, and see what’s to be got.”

“Well, be quick,” said Paulina.

“Won’t you come in and have some, too?” asked the man. “You must be hungry.”



“Yes, I’m hungry; but I don’t want to come into the house. It’ll only take up time. You can bring me out something to eat.”

By the time the two wanderers had partaken of some refreshment, the equipage and retinue were prepared to start. The man helped the little girl into the luxurious coach, took his place beside her, and the next instant they were off at a smart pace. As the sledge glided smoothly over the frozen snow, and the dark objects that skirted the way seemed to be flying past, and the road to be melting before them,—as she felt herself borne swiftly and easily along, Paulina could have believed herself in some pleasant dream, so wondrous did it all appear. She sat breathless, fixed, and perfectly upright, unable as yet to yield herself to the full luxury of her position, in the bewilderment of its novelty.

“Presently,” she said. “I can hardly yet make myself believe that it is all real; that I am actually flying on thus, speedily and delightfully, instead of toiling along on foot. It is like magic. It must be a fairy car.”

“In truth,” said the man, “it does seem a marvellously well-contrived sort of affair, this sledge coach. See here, what commodious pouches in the side! Well stored, I dare swear, with comforts of all kinds. Ay, here is a shawl for the throat. Truly, the owner must be a fellow of some taste to provide thus for his accommodation in travelling.”

“The credit for the arrangements may belong to his servants,” said Paulina. “But, at any rate, I think he would not be pleased to see his private comforts appropriated by a stranger,” she added, as she observed the man, to her great vexation, twisting the shawl around his neck.

“Let the things alone. Take off the shawl. Give it to me. I’ll put it away, on this side, out of your reach.”

The man laughed, but did as she bade him.

“You think I’m not proof against temptation, little one,”



he said. "Do you doubt my honesty? What sort of man do you take me for?"

"It is difficult to make you out exactly," said the child. "You said something this morning that made me think you had been a soldier; yet you didn't say so, absolutely. You may be an honest man, — but I don't know. You say you are not so poor as you seem. What is your profession?"

"Profession? I don't profess anything — I — make no professions," he said, smiling.

"You are evading my question," she said, gravely. "I mean, what is your trade, — your calling?"

"I am no tradesman, — and as for my calling —"

He hesitated; and the child, looking steadily into his face, said: "You avoid answering me directly about yourself, yet you wonder that I don't tell you at once all about my father. Let us each keep our own secrets, and be good friends. Come, tell me a little about your daughter. How tall is she? Is she pretty? And is she very fond of you?"

"You will see her soon, I hope, and judge for yourself," answered the man. "But in my eyes she is very pretty, and she is certainly very fond of her father."

"Yes," answered Paulina, gravely. "But," continued she, "I dare say your daughter seems pretty to you because she has a kind and loving face. I can believe that she is really pretty, as well as pretty from affectionate looks and from being fond of her father."

"And pray what may be your reason for believing this?" rejoined he.

"Because you have rather a nice face yourself," she said.

"Rather a nice face!" echoed the man, still laughing. "Is that all the praise you can find for me? I assure you, I am accounted passing handsome; nay, I have been told a thousand



times that I am the handsomest man in all my — in all these dominions.”

“ Absurd ! ” said Paulina.

“ The handsomest man in all Russia — the handsomest man of my time — they have actually said, over and over again ! ”

“ Ridiculous ! ” exclaimed she. “ And impudent ! They were either joking, — laughing at you in their sleeve, — or trying to wheedle you. ”

“ Humph ! ” responded the man in the tone of one who half assents, half feels posed. “ But, here we are at Igorhof, ” he added, as the sledge drew up at the gates of a large mansion but indistinctly seen now through the gray twilight of a Russian evening.

“ You are getting out, here ? ” said the child. “ Have you much farther to go before you reach the place where your daughter is ? ”

“ No ; 'tis close by. Give me your hand. 'Tis my turn to guide you, now. ”

He led her on, — she could not see exactly where, by reason of the deepening darkness ; but it seemed to her as though they crossed a spacious area or courtyard, in the direction of the grand mansion indistinctly seen.

They stopped at a small side door, which he opened, and entered. Within was a kind of vestibule, lighted by the softened light of a lamp, that hung at the foot of a winding staircase.

“ Have you a right here ? Are you not making your way into a strange house ? ” said Paulina, hanging back, as the man prepared to mount the stairs, still holding her by the hand.

“ Trust to me — as I trusted you, in the forest, ” said the man, smiling. “ Trust to me, and, — to use your own word, — never fear ! ”

As he finished speaking, they reached the top of the staircase ;





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and, throwing open a door which stood opposite to them on the landing-place, the man led her forward into a spacious room, richly furnished, hung with tapestry, and lighted by a large silver lamp suspended from the ceiling.

The man threw a hasty glance around, as if in search of some one; then, muttering, "She will be here soon," threw himself upon one of the cushioned couches, as if thoroughly wearied. Presently, his eye rested upon some papers that lay piled upon the table. He drew the heap toward him, and began turning them over, when his hand was arrested by Paulina's exclaiming: "How can you? Don't you know it is dishonorable to peer into papers that belong to others?"

"Humph! You keep a strict eye upon me, my little guardian. This is one of my doings, I suppose, that you don't approve of?"

"It is," said Paulina.

"And the others, pray? What may they be?" he rejoined.

"I didn't like your meddling with the articles in the sledge pockets; I didn't like your creeping into this house without announcing yourself. It makes me sometimes suspect —"

"Well?" said the man.

"That you are, — in short, that you are — a thief."

The man was still laughing at this uncompromising reply, when the door of the apartment opened, and a little girl entered. She was very young, but there was such ease, grace, and high breeding in her air, that she seemed older than she really was.

As she advanced into the room, she gazed with a quiet wonder at the two strange figures there; but, looking more intently at the man, — whose coarse, rude garments at first prevented her recognizing him, — she sprang forward, and threw herself into his arms, exclaiming, "Father! dear father!"

He embraced her fondly in return, and for a few moments



they were wholly engrossed with each other. Presently, he turned to where Paulina stood in mute astonishment at this scene, and said: "But I must not forget my little preserver. Thank her, Hermione. I owe her my life. She helped me out of that confounded wood, where I might have wandered on till now — or



perished, starving of cold and hunger. She saved me from the snow sleep, in which I might have been frozen to death. She guided me through all these mortal dangers, to say nothing of her keeping guard upon my morals."

He was laughing heartily as he concluded, but Paulina never altered from the serious look with which she regarded him. She kept her eyes steadily upon his face, with the grave scrutiny



with which from time to time she had observed him, ever since she had had doubts of his being the poor destitute creature he had seemed at first.

“Well, little one, have you made up your mind yet about me?” he said.

“I have heard of robbers going out prowling in poor shabby clothes, and having a rich home, with plenty of luxuries to come to,” she said in her straightforward way; “so you may still be what I took you for, — a thief. But somehow I don’t think you are, now.”

“And pray what may have altered your opinion?” said he.

“Your daughter,” she replied. “Since I have seen her, I think you must be an honest man, — an honorable man, a gentleman, — for all you are meanly dressed. Perhaps that may have been from some chance — some accident, and that you are, in fact, some great lord.”

“Well done! Well aimed!” he exclaimed. “Come,” added he, “I’ll make a bargain with you. If you’ll tell me your father’s name, I’ll tell you who I am.”

“As I believe you to be honorable,” she said, keeping her eyes upon his face, “I will tell you his name. It is Vladimir Betzkoi.”

The man’s brow darkened, then contracted into a frown. But after a few seconds it cleared, and he muttered, “I will not believe it. His child’s artless speeches and conduct bear proof that he must be a man of worth and probity. At all events, I will have it looked to.”

Then he added aloud: “You did me no less than justice, little one, in believing me a man of honor. Now that you have trusted me with your father’s name, I will use all my power to have his case inquired into.”

“You will interest your friends! You will use your influence



with them to have my father's case properly represented to the emperor! You will do what you can for us!" exclaimed Paulina, her eyes sparkling with joy, and fixed eagerly and hopefully upon the man's face. He nodded and she went on: "I remember. You said you knew the master of this house. He must be a rich man — a powerful lord — you will interest him? You will speak to him in my father's behalf?"

Again the man nodded; and again Paulina went eagerly on: "Will you let me see your friend, and tell him myself? The master of the house! Perhaps he's at home now! Come, let us go to him at once!" she exclaimed, starting up, and seizing the man's arm.

"Softly, softly, little one," answered he, smiling. "You forget how tired I am with my wanderings."

"I am thoughtless, selfish, — I forget all, in my one concern for my father; but you will forgive his daughter for her sake, won't you?" said Paulina, pointing to Hermione, and then proceeding to bustle about, as she had done at the peasant's hut, drawing off his gloves, and helping him remove his cloak.

His daughter joined her in her ministry, with her own quiet, gentle, yet decided manner. She had stood by her father's side the whole time, with one arm upon his shoulder, as he sat; while he held her in one of his, passed around her waist.

"You have fasted, then? — you have been delayed on your journey? — some accident? — these clothes?" she now said, in her tender voice, full of affectionate interest, though so gentle and low. "Dear father, tell me what has happened. But first you must need refreshment. They shall bring supper here."

"Ay, let it be so," he answered. "And, Hermione," he went on, beckoning her to lean down and listen to something that he whispered in her ear. She looked in his face with a smile, as he concluded, and then glided swiftly from the room to give her orders.



Presently Hermione returned, followed by a train of servants, with preparations for the meal. Some spread the table; while others drew near to the couch where the man sat, bearing a furred dressing-gown and slippers.

Paulina put out her hand for the latter.

The attendant would have withheld them, but, at a sign from the man, gave them to her. She put them carefully on his feet, saying: "Now for your wrapping-gown."

The other attendant stepped forward, about to hold it ready; but Paulina took that also from his hands, with "No, no; give it me. I'll put it on. I'll step on the stool, on tiptoe; and I shall be able to reach."

"Let her do it," said the man, and with his amused smile.

"You have not yet told me your name," she resumed. "If you're not a thief, you do not keep your promises, and that's nearly as bad."

There was a stir, and a look of amazement among the attendants; but the next moment it subsided.

"Is not that rather a rude way of reminding a person of his promise?" asked Hermione, with her calm smile.

"I don't mean to be rude, but I speak the truth," said Paulina, in her grave way, which was too sincere, earnest, and straightforward to be insolent. "I observed my part of the bargain at once. I put myself in your father's power by trusting him with the name he asked; and I expected he would keep his word with me in return."

"He will do so, be sure," said Hermione, smiling, and looking at her father.

He nodded, saying: "But let us have some supper first."

He chatted gaily, and seemed in high spirits, and very happy, as he sat between the two little girls, his daughter Hermione on one side of him, Paulina on the other.



“How came you to tell me such a fib about your daughter?” said Paulina, suddenly.

“How do you mean?” was the reply.

“You told me she was pretty, didn’t you?”

“Yes; don’t you think her so?”

“No; she’s very different from pretty. She has the most beautiful face I ever saw. It’s like what I fancy a queen’s must be.”

“You hear how plain-spoken she is,” said Hermione’s father. “She told me just as openly, — but far less complimentarily, — what she thought of my face.”

Hermione gazed fondly upon the face in question, and smiled.

“Then you wouldn’t like to know you were never to look upon it again, — for all its ugliness; eh, little one?” said the owner, laughing, and turning to Paulina.

“‘Like to know!’” she repeated, with more than even her usual gravity. “It would make me very unhappy. I have taken a great fancy to your face — to you — I should be very, very miserable if I thought —”

The child stopped, with a break in her voice that was even more eloquent than speech.

The man was touched with the artless evidence of liking in this sincere little creature. After the pause of a minute, he said: “Come, give me a kiss upon this ugly cheek of mine. I’ll promise you that you shall hereafter see as much of this homely face that you’ve taken a fancy to as you could wish. You and I are friends for life; for you saved mine, remember.”

“If she don’t remember it, we ever will, will we not, my father?” said Hermione, as Paulina stood on tiptoe beside him, and gave him the kiss he had asked, heartily and affectionately, saying at the same time, with playfulness: “I trust to this promise, though you broke the other. I’ll believe you will keep your word,



that we shall be always friends, though you have not yet kept your word, and told me who you are. I ought to have held back my kiss, till I knew who claimed it."

"I have a father's right to it," answered he. "I am your father, while your own is away."

"My father!" she exclaimed.

"Your father!" he repeated; "the father of all my subjects, — the father of my people. I am the Emperor of Russia."

Paulina stood gazing at him fixedly, in utter astonishment. Her face worked eagerly; her breath went and came. Then she dropped upon her knees, flung her head on his, and clasped them around, as she exclaimed: "My father! My own father! Think of him! Grant him his freedom! Pardon him! Remember the Christ-child, whose day this is! For His sake pardon my father!"

The emperor kindly bent over her, and spoke soothingly.

Presently she started up. "Yet why do I say, 'Pardon him.' He has done nothing that needs pardon. He has been ever loyal and faithful. Do him justice! Redress the wrong that has been done him, and restore to yourself a devoted officer and servant!"

"If only for his child's sake —" the emperor began.

But Paulina interrupted him with: "Not for mine! Not because I happened to do you a service! But because he himself deserves to be freed — he who has been punished as a traitor, when he was none."

"Never fear, little Conscientious!" said the monarch, laughing. "Entire justice shall be done. Your father shall have the benefit of a close investigation into his case. Will that satisfy you?"

"Quite," she said in her grave way.

"And now, you will tell all your adventures, my father, will you not?" said the calm, sweet voice of Hermione.



“I will tell you the whole story,” said the emperor, drawing her within his arm, as before, while he left his other hand in the grasp of Paulina. “I was on my road hither from Kief to keep the Christmas time, when the sledge was by accident overturned,



just on the borders of the forest. My people helped me into a sort of miserable cabin, — the nearest at hand; and, as my clothes had become wet with the snow, when I arrived there I donned some of the good man's dry apparel in place of mine own, until they could be dried. While this was being done, feel-



ing stifled with the smoky atmosphere of the cabin, I strolled forth into the open air. The snow-storm had abated. I wandered on, striking into the forest, until, at length, the snow beginning to fall thickly again, I woke up to a sense of danger, — that I was losing my way, — that I should be unable to retrace it, — that I should find difficulty in making my people aware of my situation. I shouted, but in vain. I plunged desperately on, but felt that I only involved myself further, and that each step but diminished the chances of rescue. In this perplexity I encountered my little friend here, who kindly took me in hand, and managed for me, when I could not have helped myself, — Emperor of all the Russias as I was, — and bit of a thing as she was. While we were housed at her friendly peasant woman's hut, — whither she had conducted me for food and rest, — it happened that my faithful Ivan joined me, having found where I had taken refuge. He had set out in search of me, the instant he learned I was missing, and had succeeded in tracking me there. It was while Paulina was in the inner room that he entered the outer one where I sat. He could hardly restrain an exclamation of joy when he discovered me; but I made him a signal of silence, and in a low voice rapidly explained my desire that he should go back to his fellows, bid them meet me on the following day with the carriage at the village post-house, and observe, with them, the utmost care in avoiding any betrayal of my identity."

"Ah, I thought I heard voices!" exclaimed Paulina, who had been listening breathlessly to this account; "low as you spoke, I heard you!"

"Your instructions were obeyed, my dear father, and you were able to remain unknown for any other than the poor man you seemed?" said Hermione.

"All went well," replied her father. "The sledge met us



at the place appointed, and the men played their parts to perfection.

“ Well, when we arrived here,” he resumed, “ Little Scrupulous must needs take it into her head that I was a burglar, stealing into a strange dwelling-house, and roundly she took me to task for my evil deeds, and for endeavoring to make her an accomplice. But I found means to pacify her suspicions, until your appearance did them all away, teaching her to confide in the belief that your father was an honest man, as I have come to the same conclusion respecting hers, through a like guarantee. Well is it for a parent, when his child’s ingenuous face vouches for his own integrity.”

Paulina’s father was recalled from exile; his innocence triumphantly proved, while he himself was reinstated in all his former possessions; the emperor graciously and distinctly signifying that it was a simple act of justice, and that he himself rejoiced to have a faithful subject restored to his service.

On his return, he found his little daughter in high favor at court. She was encouraged and indulged by the emperor, who took a strange fancy to that familiarity and blunt sincerity in her, the least approach to which he would have so strongly resented in any other being. Hermione took a great liking to Paulina, and had for her that firmest and most enduring of regards, an attachment founded on confidence, esteem, and respect. They grew up together, less like princess and dependant, than friends.

Her father’s military duties taking him away from home a great deal, little Paulina remained with the princess, eventually becoming one of her ladies in waiting, and finally marrying a Sicilian nobleman. In her far-away home she often entertained her children by telling them tales of the fatherland, not the least interesting of which was the story of the happiest Christmas she ever knew, — the one on which she rescued the emperor in the forest, and obtained her father’s pardon.







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